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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004094

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQ EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE, 14 DECEMBER 2007

REF: BAGHDAD 4002

Classified By: Economic Minister Counselor Charles P. Ries for reasons  
1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In the absence of Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki, National Security Advisor Muwaffuk Rubaie chaired the Baghdad Security Plan (Fardh al Qanoon ) FAQ) Iraq Executive Steering Committee (I-ESC) on December 14. Rubaie announced that the Government of Iraq (GoI) will launch their new kerosene distribution plan on December 15 in the Kindi neighborhood of Baghdad's Karkh district. The meeting also featured a wide ranging discussion about the health sector in Baghdad, including the burden caused by shortages of doctors and key medicines. Attendees also reiterated calls to dramatically increase the number of refurbished and new schools in Baghdad. END SUMMARY.

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New Kero Distribution and Monitoring Strategy to Launch in  
Karkh on 15 Dec  
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¶2. (C) NSA Rubaie announced that the new GoI-created strategic plan to improve Kerosene delivery in Baghdad (reftel) would begin on 15 December. (NOTE: Embassy officials attended the December 12 negotiations between Saeed Najeem, a member of the NSA Office and I-ESC Secretary who has led the GoI initiative to reform the kerosene distribution system, and General Aboud of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC). Notably, General Aboud was hesitant to commit fully to the new strategy due to a lack of manpower with the skills required both to enforce security measures and fulfill an auditing role at fuel depots and gas stations in Baghdad. Jabor and Aboud reached agreement about the specific role of the BOC in the December 15 launch of the plan in the Kindi neighborhood of Karkh district. Embassy and MNF-I have taken steps to monitor the implementation and impact of the plan. END NOTE.)

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Additional Calls for Major Increases in School Spending  
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¶3. (C) In follow-up to last week's discussion of the poor state of Iraq's schools, the Minister of Education again called for a new national campaign and increased spending for refurbishments and new schools. (Comment: Treasury Attach data from the Ministry of Finance reports that the Ministry of Education has only executed 30% of its \$290 million 2007 capital budget. End Comment.) I-ESC Service Chair Dr. Ahmed Chalabi urged that contracting procedures be speeded up, noting that the paltry rate of school construction was lagging even behind the 4% annual increase in Iraqi population, meaning that the school shortage is growing steadily worse.

¶4. (C) In response to questions from NSA Rubaie as to whether the Minister was taking steps to improve education in violent

areas, the Minister explained that any teacher or student who reports a threat is immediately eligible to be transferred to another school. Every school in Iraq, the Minister stated, must accept any student who wishes to attend. The students' previous grades are frozen and transferred with them.

15. (C) FaQ Civilian Spokesman Tahseen Sheekly reported that he had made a recent visit to the Zuniya Technical High School and that the school, noted as previously the best high school in Baghdad by several attendees, lacked any basic scientific equipment and was in an overall poor state. Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir was notably disappointed by this news. (Comment. The discussion of education tended to evoke a stronger personal response from senior GoI leaders than have other service issues. End Comment.)

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Teachers to Stage One-Day Strike on 16 Dec  
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16. (C) The Minister of Education noted that teachers would be staging a one-day strike over security and wage conditions on Sunday, December 16. Saying that the strike was "legitimate and should be supported," he called for the Ministry of Finance to increase teacher wages. The Minister stated that the average monthly wage in the KRG is 435,000 Dinars/month vs. 260,000 Dinars/month in Baghdad.

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Shortage of Medicine and Doctors Cited in Discussion of  
Health Sector Woes  
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17. (C) Both Dr. Adel, the Deputy Minister of Health and Dr.

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Jamal, Chief of Health for Baghdad Province, decried the lack of essential life-saving medicines available at Baghdad's hospitals. The Minister of Health reported that he had recently completed deals with companies in the UAE to increase supplies, but that bureaucratic contracting procedures slowed procurement.

18. (C) While the Minister of Health claimed that none of Iraq's pre-2003 hospitals remained closed, he stated that staffing shortfalls caused by violence and low wages continued to diminish the quality of medical care available in Baghdad. Of particular concern, the Minister stated, are specialists such as anesthesiologists. Dr. Adel called for special recruiting efforts to bring back Baghdad's doctors from Syria and the KRG and for the Ministry of Finance to increase wages 25%, claiming that doctor's only make "30 cents per hour."

19. (C) CG Petraeus responded tersely to Dr. Adel's comments that many new primary health clinics built by the Coalition in Baghdad were unsuitable due to poor contractor oversight. Petraeus stated that he would not listen to criticism of the billions of dollars that American tax-payers had invested in Iraq and that while there have unquestionable been some projects that have experienced problems some projects poorly built, the primary health clinics were well built to a standard specification complete with all equipment and medicine and are ready to be used but for the shortage in medical professionals. Petraeus highlighted 12 Coalition built clinics had been opened in Baghdad, 10 more had been turned over to the Ministry of Health but not opened due to staff shortage, and that and additional 4 would be completed in coming months. 72 have been turned over to Iraqis throughout Iraq Dr. Adel quickly retracted his criticism of the health clinics and noted that the clinics had, indeed, been built to a very good standard and that the Ministry intended to adopt it as the standard in Iraq (Comment. The criticism of Coalition contractor oversight mirrors comments made at last week's I-ESC regarding school projects and USG funded work on Baghdad's sewer system. End Comment).

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Ministries of Defense, Interior and Health Agree to Share  
Funding for First  
Dedicated Military Hospital  
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¶10. (C) Minister of Defense Abdul Qadir stated his agreement to fund a "big share" of finances required to convert the Al-Karkh Hospital into Baghdad's first dedicated military hospital. Dr. Chalabi pointed out that this agreement was made over 6 weeks ago at his committee and that the late January date to begin the conversion was unnecessarily long. Dr. Chalabi called for the Ministry of Finance to release the required funding immediately. (Comment. The Minister of Finance has never attended the I-ESC. It is unclear why if the Ministries of Defense, Health and Interior are sharing the budget for this project and themselves have substantial unallocated funds in their capital budgets, Ministry of Finance involvement is needed. Recent Ministry of Finance data provided via Treasury Attach shows Ministry of Interior having allocated 1% of its \$68 million 2007 Capital Budget. End Comment).

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Next I-ESC Expected in Two Weeks  
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¶11. (C) Due to the coming Eid holiday, it is expected that the 21 December I-ESC will be cancelled. Displaced persons was an agenda topic for this week but it was not discussed in detail due to the absence of the Ministry of Displaced Persons. It is expected to feature prominently in the next I-ESC.  
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